

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

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A high ledge serves as the habitat for pigeons and other feathered folk. Man was designed for loftier locales—outer space, for example. And so when a fellow finds himself on a lowly high ledge, he needs friends—a minimum of one.



22 STORIES UP— 22 DOWN

by Jack Ritchie

DETECTIVE Sergeant Galen rubbed at the tightness in the back of his neck. *I'm not right for this kind of a job. I don't feel sorry for him. I think he's a fool.*

He leaned farther out on the window sill and tried to think of something more to say to the tall quiet man who stood on the ledge twenty-two stories above the street.

You want somebody to hold your hand. You want someone to tell you that the whole world loves you. But that isn't so, mister. The world doesn't care whether you live or die.

Galen felt the wind tug at his hat and pulled the brim more securely over his forehead. *I wish I could do this my way. I wish I could tell you to make up your mind right now. Stop wasting time. Come back in here or jump.*

The tall gray-templed man smiled apologetically. "I'm sorry to cause all this trouble. This should have

been all over twenty minutes ago. When I rented the room, I had intended to jump immediately, but then as I stood here I had the thought that I might injure or kill someone down below. I decided to wait until the streets were completely clear."

Galen forced away an unsympathetic grimace. *How considerate of you, Mr. Turner. Well, buddy, the streets are clear now. You won't kill anybody but yourself.*

Turner had a faint smile on his face and Galen had the feeling that his mind was being read. He flushed slightly. "This is all foolish, Mr. Turner. Money isn't so important that you have to kill yourself because of it."

Turner looked down at the street. "I'm not really an exhibitionist, you know. I had intended to do this without an audience."

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dark mass of people behind the ropes below. *They're probably making bets about you.* He felt a tap on his shoulder and turned back into the room.

Patrolman Holand spoke into his ear. "We were able to locate Turner's wife. She's coming up the elevator now."

Galen nodded and moved away from the window. "Keep talking to him, Holand. Do your best."

He went to the plain hotel dresser and picked up the wallet again. Edward George Turner. Born 1910. Driver's license, social security card, miscellaneous slips and cards. Forty-seven dollars and change.

Galen's partner, Sergeant Morris, yawned and sat down on the undisturbed bed. "According to Turner's note, he lost the thirty thousand dollars playing the horses. He doesn't look like the type to get rid of money that way."

Galen shrugged and tossed the wallet back on the dresser.

Morris lit a cigarette and glanced at his watch. "I wish he'd get it over with. I'm supposed to go bowling tonight."

There was a knock at the door and Galen turned the knob.

The dark-haired woman in her early twenties regarded him with wary eyes.

Galen took the cigar out of his mouth. "Mrs. Turner?"

Her diamond earrings glittered as she nodded.

Galen stepped aside. "Your hus-

band is out there on the ledge threatening to jump."

Her eyes narrowed. "Why would he want to do something like that?"

Galen unfolded Turner's note and handed it to her. "According to this, he confesses stealing money from his firm. He says he lost it on the horses."

There was a faint flicker in her eyes as she read.

Galen watched her. "Did you know anything about this?"

"Of course not," she snapped. "Why should I?"

"You're his wife." Galen felt a touch of curiosity. "Just what kind of a man is your husband, Mrs. Turner?"

She shrugged. "He keeps to himself a lot. You never know what he's thinking."

"How long have you been married?"

"Two years."

Galen hesitated a moment. "Your husband is considerably older than you?"

Her voice was sharp. "I married him because I love him."

Galen rubbed at the tightness in his neck again. "I think you'd better tell that to him. It might mean something to him."

Ellen Turner stared down at the street and shuddered. She pulled the collar of her coat high around her throat.

Her eyes went to her husband.

His face was pale and his eyes were closed.

Ellen felt a wave of anger. *You're making fools out of both of us before thousands of people.*

She was conscious of Galen at her elbow and tried to keep the fury out of her voice. "Don't be stupid, Edward."

Edward Turner opened his eyes. "I really hadn't expected to see you again, my dear."

She couldn't keep the edge from her words. "You're making yourself look ridiculous. And me too."

He smiled faintly. "I'm sorry. I realize that you've never lost a husband this way before."

She glanced covertly at Galen. "According to your note, you stole money from the firm."

The smile seemed to go to his eyes and he nodded.

Ellen was aware that Galen's eyes were on her. She bit her lip nervously. "I never knew anything about that, Edward. You never told me. I can swear to that."

Turner smiled almost absently. "You knew absolutely nothing, my dear. I spent the money at the race track."

Ellen turned to Galen. "Must you eavesdrop?"

Galen glanced at Turner and then walked away from the window.

When Ellen looked at her husband again, he was watching her.

"You never wondered how a simple office manager could bring

home triple his salary every month?" he asked wryly.

Ellen flushed. "I thought the money came from your savings."

"You went through that the first year. Don't you remember?"

Her temper broke. "You seemed to be doing all right. Why is this necessary now?"

He glanced at the clock in the church tower across the street. "A matter of auditors, my dear. They're going to examine the books in a few days." He met her eyes and smiled again. "You'd better hide your furs and jewelry. The police might not believe I lost the money at the tracks."

Her eyes glowed fiercely. "They're mine. Nobody can take them away from me."

Turner kept smiling. "I know you'll fight for them. They mean so much to you."

"You're not doing me or anybody else a favor by this. Your insurance is no good if you commit suicide."

The skin around Turner's eyes crinkled. "I thought about that, of course. I have quite a keen sense of responsibility, my dear, and I've made arrangements that ought to satisfy you. For a little time, at least. I'm sure that you'll have no difficulty in finding someone else to take care of you in a year or two, Ellen."

He met her eyes. "You'll find a safety deposit box key and a letter of information in the top drawer of my bureau at home. They will

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lead you to ten thousand dollars." His lips parted in a noiseless chuckle. "That is also the firm's money. You may consider it my insurance."

Ellen experienced a wave of relief. She remembered the shock of being left almost penniless when her second husband died. He had left her practically nothing. The house had been impossibly mortgaged and he had even borrowed heavily on his insurance. When everything was settled, there had been less than a thousand dollars left.

It had been horrible having to get a job again. She had forgotten most of her shorthand and she had had to cut her fingernails, actually ruining them, so that she could use the typewriter.

She studied her husband's profile. Edward's life must have been so dull before she came to work in his office. Just work all day and then a lonely apartment in the evening. But she had showed him how to enjoy life, how to have fun and be seen in the right places.

She smiled to herself. It hadn't been at all difficult to get Edward. He wasn't used to attention. Not by an attractive woman.

Her thoughts went momentarily to Miss Adams, Edward's secretary, and she shook her head. You have to know how to dress. How to be noticed. You have to be vivacious, full of life. It was foolish to wait for years and years and simply do

your job and be intelligent and quiet.

She looked at Edward. Perhaps he was right about this. It would all be better this way.

A sudden fright gripped her. Suppose he decided not to jump? There wouldn't be any ten thousand dollars. Her furs and jewelry might even be taken away from her.

The thought made her frightened and cold.

Galen lit a new cigar. He glanced at Mrs. Turner at the window and experienced a sense of distaste. He wished for a moment that he could hear what she was saying. Then he shrugged. What was the difference? Whatever words she was using weren't making much of an impression on Turner.

Sergeant Morris picked up the phone. "I'm going to have coffee and some sandwiches brought up. You want anything to eat?"

Galen grinned tightly. "Suppose your food gets up here after he jumps. Won't that spoil your appetite?"

Morris wasn't bothered. "I'm not the sensitive type. My stomach is my soul."

Galen was conscious of hunger too, but he shook his head. "Just coffee for me."

There was a knock at the door and Galen pulled it open.

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behind his rimless glasses. "I'm Henry Welch. I don't see why I had to be brought here. There isn't anything I can possibly do."

Galen looked him over. "Maybe not, but I've got to try everything. According to a note Turner wrote, he confesses stealing money from your firm."

"It isn't my firm," Welch said peevishly. "I'm just the assistant manager. Mr. Chambers is the owner."

Galen took a deep breath. "Where is Mr. Chambers?"

"He's in Florida," Welch said bitterly. "He's always in Florida."

Galen shrugged. "Then we'll settle for you. As assistant manager, perhaps you had suspicions that Turner was embezzling from the firm."

"I knew nothing at all about that," Welch said firmly. "I mind my own business and I hope others mind theirs."

Mrs. Turner spoke from the window. "Sergeant, I'm afraid there's nothing I can do. My husband's determined to jump."

Galen glanced at her. *As far as she's concerned, it's finished. Now she's tapping her foot and waiting.*

He turned to Welch. "I'd like you to talk to him."

Welch's mouth dropped. "What in the world could I say if his own wife can't help him?"

"I don't know," Galen snapped. "Nobody knows. But you're here and I'm telling you to try. There

might be some word that can save him. We've got to find what that word is."

Welch shook his head. "It's absolutely useless."

Galen's eyes smouldered. "Are you refusing to help?"

Welch flushed under Galen's glare. "All right," he said grudgingly. "I suppose I can't refuse."

Welch experienced panic as he looked down. He took a firmer grip on the sill.

Turner was staring straight ahead. He seemed to be watching the clock on the church tower.

Welch held his breath. *He's going to jump. I can tell that. He's going to jump right now!*

Galen's whisper was urgent. "Say something fast."

Welch was fascinated as he watched Turner's right foot edge slowly forward. *Five seconds more. Five seconds and it will all be over.*

Galen shoved him aside. "Turner," he shouted. "Mr. Welch would like to talk to you."

Turner hesitated. He frowned as though he resented being interrupted. Then he relaxed.

Welch felt himself pushed back to the window. "All right he snapped irritably. "I'll talk to him. You don't have to get rough."

He cleared his throat. "Mr. Turner, there's no need for this. I'm sure something could be worked out."

Turner raised an eyebrow and smiled. "Well, Henry, what are you doing here?"

Welch's stomach tightened with familiar anger at the tone of the voice. *Well, Henry, what are you doing here? See that these vouchers are completed by noon, Henry. I hired another clerk for you, Henry. I fired one of your clerks, Henry. We'll have to work overtime, Henry. Good morning, Henry. Good night, Henry.*

Welch raised his voice against the wind. "This won't solve anything, Mr. Turner. I'm sure that if you make restitution everything will turn out all right."

Turner smiled faintly. "You think that, Henry?"

You think that, Henry? No, I don't. I, Henry, don't. Why are you just standing there? Jump! Die!

The taste of bitterness was in Welch's mouth. *I suppose Mr. Chambers will bring in someone else to be the manager when you're gone. It doesn't matter that I've been with the firm for thirty-five years. It didn't matter before that I should have had the job. Mr. Chambers will want somebody tall, somebody who looks distinguished. Somebody who will steal from the company.*

He heard Galen's impatient voice. "Keep talking to him."

Welch turned indignantly. "Can't you see that it's no use?"

There was suspicion in Galen's eyes. "Do you want him to jump?"

"Of course not," Welch said swiftly. "But it must be obvious that there's nothing I can do."

His eyes went back to Turner and he almost ground his teeth with rage. *Go ahead, my dear Mr. Turner. Jump right now! This instant!*

Galen pulled him roughly back into the room.

Welch straightened his tie. "I simply don't know what to say to the man, Sergeant."

He watched Galen lean out of the window.

There's nothing you can do or say either. Why try so hard?

Galen's eyes went to the church tower clock. It was six twenty-two.

Turner watched him. "Don't be impatient, Sergeant. I'll jump at six-thirty. It's a nice precise time. I'm afraid I'm still a bookkeeper at heart."

Galen waited for a gust of wind to die before he spoke. "I suppose you spent a lot of time at the tracks. Hialeah's a nice place."

"Yes," Turner said. "I lost a lot of money there."

Galen clicked his tongue. "It must have been a long ride back and forth every day. Hialeah's about twelve hundred miles from here."

Turner shrugged. "I can't remember names. I went to one of the tracks around here."

Galen's voice was definite. "You

spent the money on your wife, Turner."

Turner shook his head. "No. I lost it at the tracks. All of it."

Galen smiled thinly. "You strike me as the kind of a man who shows a woman his bank book before he asks her to marry him."

Turner appeared to flush.

"And because you're like that, it just doesn't figure that you'd leave your wife flat broke in this world. Your insurance is probably worthless if you jump."

Turner said nothing.

"We'll do a lot of checking when you're gone, Turner. This isn't the end of things. If your wife does any big spending, she can get into a lot of trouble."

Galen watched the silent Turner and then took a tired breath. *There's nothing else I can think of to get him back in here. If there's a word to end this, I don't know what it is.*

Turner had a little smile on his face. "I suppose you want me to jump and get it over with, Sergeant?"

Galen controlled his words. "No. You're a human being and I want you to live." His eyes strayed to the church tower. It was six twenty-eight. "You can wait another five minutes. Five minutes doesn't make any difference when it's measured against eternity."

Turner smiled wearily. "You have a point there, Sergeant, but I intend to jump at six-thirty."

Galen studied him. *I'll have to give it one more try. Everybody's lonely, Turner.*

Turner was startled. "Why did you say that?"

That's it, Galen thought with a trace of surprise. You may not even know it yourself, but you aren't killing yourself because of money, or to protect your wife, or any of a dozen obvious reasons. Your life has been empty. You're alone and tired, and life has no purpose for you.

Galen felt Patrolman Holand's touch.

"There's a Miss Adams here. A Miss Frances Adams."

Galen turned. Miss Adams was in her early thirties, he guessed. Her features were plain and there seemed to be something strange in her eyes.

Her voice was quiet. "I'd like to help, if I can."

Galen leaned out of the window. "Turner, there's a Miss Adams who would like to talk to you."

Turner frowned. "Did you send for her too?"

Galen shook his head. "No. I never knew she existed."

Turner's face became pensive. "Yes. She's very quiet. Very quiet. She's my secretary."

Turner watched Galen disappear from the window momentarily. *It's strange that the Sergeant should hit upon the very thing that really*

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has me out here on this ledge. I suppose I've never actually realized it before, but my life has been empty. There's nothing ahead for me. Not when I'm alone.

He smiled wryly. *My wife wants me dead, but that doesn't bother me at all. And poor Henry. He hates me enough to want the same thing, but my death won't help him. He'll probably miss the managership again.*

Miss Adams? I've never really thought about her before. Always near. Quiet, but always present when I needed her.

He remembered the many things that had become so familiar that he had taken them for granted. How she could almost anticipate his every wish and mood; how she would volunteer to work late at night when reports had to be completed; how she was ready with aspirins and a glass of water even before he himself was aware that he had a headache.

He became conscious of the height for the first time and backed closer to the side of the building. *How long has she been with me? Ten years? No, nine. That's it.*

Yes, I should have known long before this how she feels about me.

He watched Miss Adams appear at the window. *One person. That's all it takes. Just one person to want you.*

He remembered the stricken look on her face when he had told her that he was going to marry Ellen. Her face had actually become white. And she hadn't been to the wedding.

He looked at Miss Adams and smiled. *How terrible you must have felt. How alone and lost. I realize that now.*

But Miss Adams did not return the smile. Hate smouldered in her eyes and her thin lips formed one silent furious word.

Across the deep chasm, the church bells began to chime the half hour.

Sergeant Morris followed Galen into the elevator. "At least he kept his word. He jumped when he said he would."

Galen nodded and watched the operator pull the gate shut. Lord, he thought, but I'm hungry.

